

Force Marriages

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Introduction

"No one should be forced into marriage. Every girl has the right to choose her own future."

Malala Yousafzai

Forced marriage is a serious human rights problem in Pakistan, affecting thousands of girls and young women every year, even though laws exist to protect them. In 2025, Dawn reported that poverty, patriarchy, weak law enforcement, legal loopholes, and traditional social pressures continue to make forced marriages common, especially in Sindh, Punjab, and Baluchistan. These marriages harm girls by ending their education, causing early pregnancies, creating psychological trauma, and keeping families trapped in cycle of poverty. While laws like the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act are steps forward, weak enforcement and differences between provinces limit

their impacts. Dawn Suggested Solutions Such as Strict enforcement of laws, Setting the minimum marriage age at 18 everywhere, annulling child marriages, holding nikkah registrars, accountable, educating girls, and rising public awareness. This essay use 2025 examples and reports to explain why forced marriages happen, how they effect victims, and what steps can help end this harmful practice.

Forced marriages happens when one or both people are married without freely agreeing to it. In Pakistan many forced marriages overlap with child marriages because minors cannot legally give consent. According to Dawn, forced marriage can take several forms, including early marriages justified as family or cultural tradition. Editorials in Dawn, also emphasized that child marriage is a type of forced marriage because children can not make informed decisions. These marriages are not only illegal but

also morally wrong, as they take away choice and dignity from the individual.

The scale of forced marriage in Pakistan is alarming. In 2025, Dawn reported UNICEF data showing that over 19 million girls in Pakistan were married before the age of eighteen. This means that one in six women is married as a child.

Despite laws that prohibit child and forced marriages, these practices remain widespread. The report highlighted that rural areas face higher risks due to poverty, lack of education, and traditional practices, while urban areas also see forced marriages, often hidden by family pressure and manipulation of documents. The invisibility of these cases makes it hard to enforce laws and protect victims.

In 2025, one important development was the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act. It made 18 the minimum legal age for marriage

For both men and women. As Dawn pointed out, "law alone not enough; they must be enforced," highlighting that legislation is only effective when properly implemented. The newspaper also reported that provincial differences create gaps in protection. Sindh and Baluchistan had already set eighteen as the minimum age, while Punjab still allowed girls to marry at sixteen. These differences create loopholes that offenders can exploit and make legal protection uneven. Dawn reported that parliamentarians urged all provinces to adopt eighteen as the minimum age to prevent forced marriages nationwide.

Several factors contribute to forced marriages. Poverty is one of the main reasons. Families with limited income often marry off daughters early to reduce financial responsibility. Dawn reported that in rural areas, girls are seen as an economic burden, and marrying them early is viewed as a survival

Strategy. This practice treats marriage as a transaction rather than a personal choice. Families may also hope that early marriage will protect daughters from economic or social hardships, ignoring the long-term harm caused by education loss and health risks.

Patriarchy is another major cause. In 2025, editorials ~~lighted~~ highlighted that decisions about marriage are often made by male elders, while girls' opinions are ignored. Families prioritize obedience over consent.

Refusing marriage can lead to threats, or emotional pressure even violence.

These patriarchal attitudes are reinforced by cultural traditions and social expectations, teaching girls that accepting marriage is their duty.

Weak law enforcement is also a key factor. In Punjab, only twelve child marriage cases were registered in the first half of 2025, and

and none resulted in conviction. In Sindh, even where laws are stricter, offenders are sometimes granted bail, and victims remain trapped in their marriages. Legal loopholes worsen the problem. For example, a Dawn report in December 2025 noted that even if someone is convicted under the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, the marriage may still remain legally valid. This leads victims with no real protection and allows offenders to act with impunity.

Social and cultural norms further encourage forced marriages. Many families justify early marriage in the name of honor, tradition, or family reputation. Editorials described this as 'violence wrapped in tradition'. Families believe they are protecting their daughters or preserving social status, but the practice denies children their basic rights. In some

Communities, early marriage is considered the only way to prevent dishonor, even if the child is not ready.

Lack of education and awareness also contributes to the problem. Families often do not know the legal age for marriage, and girls are unaware of their rights. Nikkah registrars sometimes fail to verify ages properly. Dawn reported that this allows many underage and forced marriages to take place without consequences. Fear of social stigma also silences victims, as they worry about dishonoring their families or facing retaliation. Poor birth and marriage registration systems allow falsification of ages, making enforcement difficult. Finally, the lack of shelters, legal aids, and protective services forces victims to accept marriages they do not want, as escaping can be dangerous or socially unacceptable.

marriages are widespread, deeply rooted, and require urgent attention.

Forced marriages have serious consequences. Victims often lose their education, face early pregnancies with health risks, suffer psychological trauma and become dependent or abused for life. Children born into these marriages are at higher risk of malnutrition, poor health care and early marriage themselves. Forced marriages also contribute to cycle of poverty and gender inequality. Dawn reported that these marriages harm not just individuals but society as a whole, as girls are denied opportunities to grow, learn, and contribute to the nation.

• Laws must be enforced strictly rather than only written on paper. The minimum age should be uniform at eighteen across all provinces. Courts should automatically annul child and forced

marriages. Nikkah registrars must be held accountable, and birth and marriage registration systems should be improved. Education and public awareness campaigns are essential to inform families about the law and the harm of forced marriage. Girls' education must be encouraged, as it delays marriage and empowers them to claim their rights. Victims must have access to shelters, legal aid, and counselling. Police and judiciary officials must receive training to handle cases sensitively and effectively. Finally, local communities and civil society organizations should monitor and report violations to ensure enforcement reaches every area. Dawn emphasized that final legal reforms alone are not enough; social change is equally necessary to end forced marriages.

In conclusion, forced marriages remain a major human rights challenge in Pakistan. The 2025 coverage by

Dawn. Shows that while laws in Sindh, Baluchistan, and Islamabad represent progress, weak enforcement, provincial differences and deep rooted social norms continue to allow this practice. Forced marriage is not a private issue; it violates fundamental human rights and denies girls their freedom, dignity, and opportunity. Ending it requires a combination of strong laws, effective enforcement, education, social awareness, and protection for victims. Only through coordinated efforts by the state, civil society, and communities can Pakistan protect its children and ensure a future where every girl has the right to choose her own life.